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S E C R E T BOGOTA 002921

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/10/2029  
TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KJUS CO  
SUBJECT: DAS ONCE AGAIN EMBROILED IN DOMESTIC SPYING SCANDAL

REF: A. BOGOTA 002019  
1B. BOGOTA 000569

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield,  
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

11. (S/NF) The Administrative Department of Security (DAS) is once again under fire with illegal recordings of Colombian magistrates leaked to the press and airing on the radio. Press article contend that recent scandals and subsequent investigations have not stopped the GOC from monitoring domestic political allies and opponents alike. The GOC adamantly denied that DAS could have been behind the recordings, but the "Semana" magazine story's author told us that he had used eight reliable sources--several still working in DAS--who explained that DAS continues to be at the center of these controversies because it is much more susceptible to penetration and corruption than other GOC agencies. At an August 31 meeting in the Embassy, all USG agencies with working relationships with DAS reaffirmed that they had no knowledge of or connection to the illegal activity, and agreed to continue reducing their exposure to the agency.  
End Summary.

SEMANA BREAKS YET ANOTHER DAS DOMESTIC SPYING STORY

12. (U) Leading news magazine "Semana" reported on August 31 that the Department of Administrative Security (DAS) is still illegally intercepting the phone calls of Supreme Court magistrates, politicians, and journalists. The magazine alleged that despite an intensive investigation of the DAS by the CTI (the investigative unit of the Prosecutor General (Fiscalia)) in the wake of numerous recent scandals, the GOC had been illegally monitoring congressional representatives to keep tabs on their stands on the just-passed reelection referendum bill.

13. (U) The piece also contends that DAS has never stopped activities against longstanding targets--and Uribe adversaries--such as Ivan Velasquez, the Supreme Court's lead auxiliary magistrate in the parapolitical investigations, and other Court magistrates. The magazine cited--and made available on its website--at least one conversation between Velasquez and an Embassy official that was recorded on or about August 27, indicating the recording was ongoing up to the story's publication. (NOTE:

We believe that Velasquez, and not the official, was the target of the wiretap. End Note).

¶4. (U) The agency allegedly restarted its illegal intercepts after DAS officials realized CTI officials were only investigating older DAS offenses from around 2004-2005. The article claims this gave DAS officials the confidence to continue surveilling political opponents via discreet means such as using "parallel" networks of ex-DAS officials to carry out the actual espionage. "Semana" also reported that Fiscalia investigators learned through their interviews of DAS personnel that the agency had concealed much of its surveillance equipment from CTI investigators by hiding it in a DAS training facility in Cota, about 15 miles northwest of Bogota. The magazine did not reveal who received the reports of the taps.

GOC DENIES CLAIMS

¶5. (C) Vice President Francisco Santos told Embassy officials on August 31 that DAS Director Felipe Munoz had adamantly denied DAS involvement, noting the embattled agency was simply incapable of doing such work given the massive ongoing investigations into its activities. Munoz also said that he was expecting President Uribe to issue a decree that would overhaul DAS by slashing its personnel to about 30 percent of its current size and changing its function from a judicial law enforcement agency to a pure domestic intelligence service. Munoz was unsure of the exact timing of the decree, but expected Uribe to issue it soon.

AUTHOR TELLS EMBASSY ABOUT SOURCES

¶6. (C) Ricardo Calderon, the author of the piece, undercut these claims in a September 1 meeting with Embassy officials. Calderon emphasized the story was based on six sources currently working inside DAS (all of whom have been long-term sources who have never given him false information) and two former DAS officials. The active DAS sources told Calderon they continued to conduct the illegal surveillance because they could not afford to be fired for disobeying orders. They further told him they resented that the Fiscalia has not prosecuted those who were giving the surveillance orders, even though the evidence against them is overwhelming. The sources said that people interested in surveilling Velasquez specifically have something to lose from the parapolitical investigations, and thus want to know the direction he is taking the investigations.

¶7. (C) Calderon also noted that the sources had explained to him that DAS continues to be at the center of corruption scandals because it is much more susceptible to penetration than other GOC law enforcement agencies. It is weaker than the Colombian National Police (CNP) or the CTI, and morale is low at DAS because many corrupt DAS officials kept their jobs in the wake of the recent scandals--but many innocent people were fired. In addition, they pointed out, DAS lacks a merit-based promotion structure like the CNP or the military, which means that its officials can be more easily promoted for political reasons, such as their willingness to participate in corrupt acts. Calderon also opined that other agencies such as the CNP, the CTI, and the military could not be illegally recording because their organizational structure prevents it. If DAS Director Munoz believed he was telling the truth, it suggests that DAS is out-of-control and unresponsive to all attempts to reform it, or that rogue ex-DAS personnel are using their professional experience and commercially available equipment to do the GOC's dirty work.

EMBASSY LOWERING EXPOSURE TO DAS

¶8. (S/NF) The Ambassador convened a meeting of all USG agencies with working relationships with DAS on August 31. All agreed that the continuing saga of scandals makes relationships with DAS a political liability for the USG. All participating agencies reconfirmed that to the best of their knowledge, their counterpart units had not wittingly

participated in any of the DAS's misdeeds, and no assets, equipment, or resources provided by them to DAS were used to commit these acts.

¶9. (SBU) Since the original scandal broke in February, all Embassy agencies have reduced or eliminated their interaction with DAS, with several transferring such work to the CNP or other law enforcement or intelligence agencies. The majority of the remaining exposure is due to high-profile legacy legal cases, which will be more difficult to drop.

Brownfield